

THE MINUTES OF THE WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING April 24, 2002

Chairman Brusch called the meeting to order at 6:12 PM.

Members absent : None

Also present: Town Administrator Mel Kleckner, Assistant to the Town Administrator Joyce Munro, Treasurer Susan Kendall Freiner, Director of Finance and Administration Dr. Gerry Missal, Selectman Anne Marie Mahoney, and Selectman Paul Solomon

Discussion of FY2003 Budget and Town Meeting

Chairman Brusch passed out the (Handout 1) final Budget Resolution document stating Option B of the override has increased to \$2.4 million. She reviewed the scheduled articles for tonight and Monday night.

Chairman Brusch passed out (Handout 2) Projects Focused on Operating Belmont More Efficiently. This will be presented to Town Meeting as a slide on Monday April 29th. Each of the 10 topics will be reviewed sometime during the next year. She also pointed out most of the Town contracts are up at the end of FY2003, and the Warrant Committee will be reviewing them in keeping with item #10 Review of Collective Bargaining Contracts for Financial Impact from Handout 2.

Member Clark informed the Committee the Capital Budget Committee has discussed if future projects are in the right place. He hopes in the long run we don't lose sight of the idea of a Chief Financial Officer. We should realize the Town side "deserves a Gerry Missal." He hopes the idea of a CFO finds its way back to the Town somehow, since they are at a disadvantage for not having one. It would be more sensible, integrated, and easier on the volunteers/staff if the Town had a CFO. Chairman Brusch thanked Member Clark for that comment. She remarked while the idea of a CFO is not on the list of the "Projects" document, the topic is very near and dear to the Committee.

Chairman Brusch said on Monday night, someone would read the Resolution as Town Moderator Hall suggests. Chairman Brusch will set the scene of what will be discussed to Town Meeting, ending with the "Projects" slide. Member Widmer will give Town Meeting a mini "State-of-the-State" and Member White will give the 5-year projection. He will then introduce Town Administrator Mel Kleckner, and then Superintendent of Schools Dr. Peter Holland. Treasurer Freiner will give the tax impact to Town Meeting, and then a closing by Selectman Brownsberger. Following Town Meeting, the Board of Selectmen may stay in session and decide whether to call an override vote for the Town ballot, or depending on the hour, meet again on Tuesday to discuss this issue.

Member Hobbs offered editing suggestions for the "Projects" document. Member Hofmann also gave a suggestion regarding #5 Re-evaluate Town-owned Vehicle Rules. Member White will apply these edits to the slide before Monday night's presentation.

Chairman Brusch discussed the changes from Monday night's draft Resolution document to the final Budget Resolution document. The Option B override changed from \$2.0 million to \$2.4 million. Under the Schools, the cuts of teachers changed from 20 to 20-30 teachers. Option C remained the same. The use of the term "ILLUSTRATIVE" has been put into the document.

Member Hilgenberg questioned if closing the branch libraries is a done deal. Chairman Brusch replied it has not been definitely decided. She said the Board of Selectmen voted in favor of closing the branch libraries. Member Clark noted closing the branch libraries would make zero change in the personnel for the Library in the first year. There will also be no changes in the buildings citing as examples: book storage and heating. It will be a year, at least, two years probably and three years before closing branch libraries will show up as beneficial for the Town's budget.

Chairman Brusch told the Committee there would be three votes taken regarding the Options. Member Clark is concerned that if the Committee recommends Option B, people will think the Committee has come to the conclusion the Town can be run on Option B. He thinks this year's Option B will be next year's level service budget. He thinks Option B is more plausible as a result of yesterday morning's meeting, but he still wants to tell people that the Town they know and have come to expect requires Option C. On the other hand he noted Option B is a lot better than Option A. If there were a chance the Town leans towards Option A, then he would support Option B. What's more, he does not want next year, people will be thinking that Option B is the best they can hope for because that is what level service has become. He will vote "No" on Option A, but he's not sure about Option B or Option C.

Member Oates noted it is difficult to guess the receptivity of Town Meeting. She reminded the Committee of some upcoming projects of the Complex and Fire Stations. If \$4 million is brought to the voters, then they may not be so willing to support those upcoming projects.

Member Widmer said he would be voting "Yes" on Option B and Option C. He hopes the Board of Selectmen chooses Option B at the end of the Town Meeting because he is worried of how much can be asked of the taxpayers.

Member Morley will be voting "Yes" on B. There is a limit of what we can ask citizens to pay. People will be aware that this is not the end of the Town asking for overrides, but she would have difficulty asking the Town for a \$4 million override.

Member Hilgenberg agrees with everyone so far. She thinks the Town is going back to the voters every year or more than every year, and she has the responsibility to support the Town. She will probably be voting "Yes" on B and C. The Warrant Committee should maintain a standard to keep up a level of services established over the years.

Member Hobbs said as a Warrant Committee Member she will vote for Option B and Option C because it is important to let the people know \$2.4 million does not do it as well as the \$4 million but it will help.

Member Flewelling said his feelings are similar to Member Morley. He is very concerned about running the risk of losing Option B for the sake of Option C. He will be voting for Option B, but probably not for Option C.

Member White pointed out there is a lot more the Committee can do to make the Town more efficient. For that reason, he will vote for Option B. Option A is too much, but the process has to start somewhere.

Member Miller will be voting for Option B and Option C. There is a significant decision the community needs to make. The expectation in this community is for a level of services that is met just barely by Option C, and people will have to make the decision to take less service. People will have to take the consequences of that.

Member Curtis will be voting for Option B and Option C. He proposed to put Member Clark earlier on Chairman Bruschi's schedule Monday night. Option C is the sustainable option and Option B is ultimately not sustainable. Next year, if Option B is the level of service, then next year there will have a level service that is not up to the Town's standards.

Member Hofmann will be voting for Option B. He is troubled by the Teacher's Contract. If the McLean and O'Neill revenues were in, then this would be easier. He disagrees with Member Clark and observed there are some savings, even initially, in closing the branch libraries. He thinks there are some significant increases coming to the Town, and the Town needs to have a grasp on the long-range financial planning. He believes the Senior Center is a wonderful idea, but the Town cannot afford a Senior Center. He is very worried about the long-term finances for the Town. He will support Option B, and definitely not Option C.

Selectman Brownsberger noted the Board of Selectmen has taken a position that Option B is the politically sustainable option. If we set our level of service for Option C, then we will need overrides the next few years. The Option B override is basically the same override as last year. He reiterated Option B is the politically sustainable level for the Town.

Member McCormick stated people need to get accustomed to cutting back. He is voting for Option B. Times are tough right now. It is wrong to give people the impression the Town can give the level of services as in Option C. For the Town to try and maintain a level service budget this time around is "folly."

Member Schafer noted Option B is still not high enough to maintain a level of services. She will vote for Option B and Option C, but she is willing to go for Option C. She believes the political vote is for Option B, but the vote that truly reflects the position of the Town is Option C.

The Committee took a vote for each Option available in the Resolution. With 16 members present, the results are as follows:

Option A

- The Committee voted unanimously not to recommend said action.

Option B

- The Committee voted unanimously to recommend said action.

Option C

· Selectman Brownsberger, Member Clark, Member Widmer, Member Hilgenberg, Member Schafer, Member Hobbs, Member Miller, and Member Curtis voted to recommend said action.

· Chairman Brusch, Member Morley, Member Heigham, Member Oates, Member McCormick, Member Flewelling, Member White, and Member Hofmann voted not to recommend said action.

Chairman Brusch asked the Committee if the Warrant Committee should do as the Board of Selectmen and recommend one particular option. Member Heigham noted that it would not be a good idea due to their split on Option C.

Chairman Brusch asked the Board of Selectmen if the Warrant Committee could also meet in session with them after Monday's Town Meeting, and Selectman Brownsberger replied affirmatively.

Acceptance of Minutes

1. Member Hilgenberg made a motion, Member Oates seconded said motion, and it was unanimously voted to accept the minutes as amended of April 22, 2002.

Member Heigham made a motion, and it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 7:24 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina E. Frizzell

Interim Recording Clerk